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1. Executive Summary

Introduction

- Purpose of education to inspire confident, resilient, young people ready to tackle the challenges of a rapidly changing world and with the knowledge and skills to do so.
- Education must be embedded in the whole community.
- Children need to be equipped for the advent of Artificial Intelligence by both having strong technical element in curriculum and developing empathy and creativity.

Funding

- At least protect per-pupil spending in real terms, including in Further Education.
- Protect the pupil premium in real terms.

Educational Inequality

- Early years pupil premium increased to £1000.
- Out-of-school activities fund to help ensure every child has the opportunity for enriching activities.

Good teachers

- Support Chartered College of Teaching.
- All teachers in state schools to be Qualified Teachers (or be working towards Qualified Teacher Status).
- 50 hours Continuous Professional Development entitlement.

Structures

- Recognise the importance of democratically elected local councils in the planning and oversight of education, especially in respect of admissions, place planning and school performance as well as for SEND.
- Abolish Regional Schools Commissioners.

- Level playing field between Local Authority Schools and Multi-Academy Trusts. We would end the assumption that if a new school is needed it cannot be a Community School.

Curriculum

- Require all state schools including academy and free schools to teach a broad and balanced curriculum.
- Curriculum to include a 'curriculum for life' (eg, SRE, Citizenship, First Aid, Financial Literacy) and ensure every child has access to high quality, independent careers advice.
- Detail of curriculum to be worked out by independent Education Standards Authority without political interference.

Improvement and Inspection

- School improvement should be led by groups of schools supporting each other, including groups of LA schools.
- Uphold rigorous standards of external inspection, which should focus on judging whether school leaders are capable of leading improvement and an assessment of the whole school, looking at pupil well-being as well as results. To achieve this we will replace Ofsted with a new HM Inspector of Schools. Inspections should be every three years. Independent schools should also be subject to the same inspection regime.

Standards

- Reduce unnecessary stress on pupils and teachers and end 'teaching to the test', by scrapping existing mandatory SATs tests at both KS1 and KS2, and replace them with a formal, moderated teacher assessment at the end of each phase and some lighter touch testing.
- Replace the EBacc measure with Progress 8.
- Replace existing government performance tables ('league tables') of schools with a broader set of indicators including more qualities data about pupil wellbeing.
- Collect and publish destinations data for all secondary schools.

Further Education

- Localise a share of the apprenticeship levy.
- Give Local Authorities or Combined Authorities a clearer role coordinating FE provision.
- Ensure all schools overseen by MATs and LAs provide arms-length careers advice to all pupils.

Home schooling

- Require that children who are being educated outside a registered school be visited biannually by a representative of the Local Authority.

Out-of-school activity

- Re-direct the role of the National Citizen Service towards providing high quality out of school education for those from 11 – 18.

Health

- A specific individual responsible for mental health in schools, who would provide a link to expertise and support for children experiencing problems. They would also take a lead on developing whole-school approaches to mental wellbeing.
- Mental health care pathway beginning in schools that links with local mental health services.

SEND

- Identify trauma and neglect in the early years, and proactively provide early and evidence-based interventions to stop the trauma becoming entrenched.
- Introduce measures to reduce the number of children with special educational needs who are excluded from school – these children are six times more likely to be excluded than children with no SEND.

- Emphasis on SEND provision in inspections.

Early Years

- Early years pupil premium increased to £1000.
- All early years settings to have a training programme for staff, with the majority of staff who are working with children to either have a relevant qualification or be working towards one. Each setting should be Graduate-led.

Parents

- Parents Councils for all state schools.
- Return flexibility over term-time absences to head teachers.

2. Introduction

2.1.1 As Liberal Democrats, education lies at the centre of our liberal values. To have knowledge is to be free. Education opens the mind, it fosters understanding and tolerance, and it empowers our children and our communities to be the best they can be. It is the gift of each generation to the next, equipping the young with the best of what is currently known, so that they can create a new and better future. We believe every child deserves a great start in life so they are equipped to shape their own future, and are determined to make sure that the education system finds and unleashes the best in everyone. This is essential in order to break down the unfair divisions in our society, to ensure a productive, competitive economy and to overcome intolerance.

2.1.2 However, persistent levels of educational inequality mean far too many children leave school without the skills they need to succeed. It is the failings of successive Governments, over decades, which have resulted in the state we are in. Most worrying of all is the increasing number of children suffering from mental health issues.

2.1.3 For most families, the main questions an education system needs to answer are: is my child flourishing at school, and are they being prepared for the future? For many children, the current system fails both of these tests. The wellbeing of children needs much greater priority. Their school experience is being distorted by high-stakes accountability systems, underfunding, and increasing pressure on schools to fill the gaps left by hollowed out local government services.

2.1.4 As progressives, we embrace change and welcome developments in technology. But we need to be prepared for its consequences too. Artificial Intelligence and robotics could replace 20-40% of jobs by the time babies being born now enter the workforce. To be able to navigate this rapidly changing world successfully, in addition to the still vital basics of literacy and numeracy, children need emotional intelligence, creativity and initiative – the very things hardest to replicate in AI. And we need to teach them to be adaptable, to work

in teams, to be compassionate and contribute to wider society. So we propose a new broad-based curriculum, one that is fit for the 21st century.

2.1.5 If we are to tackle the enormous task ahead of us, we need to empower and enable all teachers to fulfil their vocation. Yet too many teachers are leaving the workforce, with stress, low pay and workload being the top reasons given. We need to reverse this trend by giving them the freedom and the time to focus on what really matters, the child, not endless bureaucracy.

2.1.6 The education of the next generation is not only for schools but also the responsibility of families and the wider community. Parents, extended families, out of school clubs, community groups, and many others play a key role in shaping the world in which our young people are growing up. While an education policy cannot shape the role of all these groups, it should take into account the whole range of influences on young people's lives.

Liberal Democrat Vision for Education 2030

Every child will have access to high-quality early years education, and their parents will have support with parenting skills, so that every child is well-prepared when they enter primary school. Sustained extra support for disadvantaged children will have significantly reduced the attainment gap. Every child will benefit from a broad and rich curriculum which will equip them for life and allow them to develop their talents, with a balance of vocational and academic subjects that suits their own strengths and needs. Our 'curriculum for life' will help people develop as well-rounded human beings, able to relate to others and be fully engaged members of the community. Everyone will leave school at 18 equipped with knowledge and skills which will allow them to succeed in work or progress to Higher and Further Education, and with the desire and capacity to undertake further learning throughout life. An end to excessive bureaucracy and improved professional development will enhance the status, expertise and wellbeing of the teaching profession, with fully qualified status the expectation for every teacher. As a result of our improved educational performance, we will see better social mobility, a more flexible and productive workforce adapting to a rapidly changing economy, and enhanced wellbeing and mental health in the population as a whole.

3. Education Funding

3.1.1 The state education system in England faces an unprecedented funding squeeze in the coming years under the Conservatives' spending plans. Even after the Government appeared to make concessions on the National Funding Formula, Schools in England will still face a reduction across England of 0.65 per cent on average (or £29 per pupil) in 2017-18. This is on top of the £2.8 billion real terms cuts every year that schools have suffered since the 2015 election.¹ This is largely because, while school budgets are adjusted in line with inflation, they are not set to grow in line with rising pupil numbers. The NAO has said that about 60% of secondary schools are in deficit, and teaching unions have warned that an extra £2bn a year is needed to bridge the funding gap.² Reports are now widespread of schools who are having to take drastic decisions like considering cutting down the school day, and of schools asking parents for donations. Teachers are leaving the profession because they feel unable to do their jobs properly. The NAO has also estimated that there are £6.7bn of building repairs needed to bring schools across the country up to standard.

3.1.2 The squeeze is made worse for many schools by the Government's deeply flawed approach to a National Funding Formula, which tries to fix historic unfairness simply by taking from some areas to give to others. An Education Policy Institute report shows that the most disadvantaged schools (as measured by the proportion of children on Free School Meals) and the schools with the highest proportions of children speaking English as an additional language are set, on average, to lose funding in London, and gain proportionately

¹ <https://www.tes.com/news/school-news/breaking-news/school-funding-cut-year-more-half-local-authorities-say-lib-dems>

² <https://www.tes.com/news/school-news/breaking-news/struggling-schools-need-extra-ps2bn-a-year-heads-tell-hammond>).

less than other schools in areas outside of London. We don't think this is good enough.

3.1.3 In our 2017 Manifesto, Liberal Democrats set out our commitment to stop these cuts to school and college budgets and at least protect per-pupil spending in real terms, including in Further Education, and we stand by these commitments. We will protect the pupil premium, and reform the National Funding Formula. Funding for these commitments was set out in our 2017 Manifesto, and we will publish a fully costed package at the time of our next manifesto. We will be able to make savings by stopping wasteful and unnecessary Conservative expenditure on setting up Free Schools where they are not needed and clawing back funds set aside for abandoned plans to expand grammar schools.

4. Educational Inequality

4.1 The Attainment Gap

4.1.1 Two children of similar capabilities, born at the same time, can have hugely different life chances due to the contexts within which they grow and develop. One is born surrounded by opportunity and culture with parents who are financially secure and comfortably off, well-educated and well-connected. For this child education includes school, conversations with family, the clubs, sports and trips. Another is born some way outside a small rural or coastal town, a place with high unemployment and few opportunities. This child's parents struggle to make ends meet, struggling financially they and their community do not have the time or money to give this child the same opportunities – fewer trips, fewer books, less conversation.

4.1.2 This latter child is exposed to poverty which has many different faces, from straight low-income poverty, affecting more and more working families in today's Britain, to poverty of opportunity and expectation undermining the value of learning and lowering educational expectations.

4.1.3 There is strong evidence that the correlation in the UK between parental wealth and educational attainment is far greater than in most other developed countries. There are cycles of underachievement and deprivation that have persisted for generations. This harms not only the children directly affected, but the whole of society. The Sutton Trust estimates that by 2050 poor social mobility will cost the UK economy up to £140 billion per year.

4.1.4 The outstanding achievements of some schools in reducing the attainment gap between rich and poor indicate strongly that attainment gaps *can* be narrowed, and strengthens our obligation to work towards a more level playing field.

4.1.5 We believe our country, our society and our communities can only improve when we unleash the best in everyone. It's a big task to

identify, reduce and ultimately remove the barriers to education. We believe that an inclusive educational policy must look both within and outside schools to ensure inclusivity and that all pupils are able to achieve their goals.

4.1.6 Unlike the current Government, we do not believe that increasing the number of state grammar schools is the way to close the attainment gap. We oppose any extension of selection in state education, including allowing Free Schools to select by academic ability.

4.2 Pupil Premium

4.2.1 The Pupil Premium, introduced as a Liberal Democrat initiative under the Coalition, allocates additional funds to schools in England according to the number of disadvantaged pupils (currently defined as those qualifying for free school meals) on their register. Recent analysis conducted by the Department for Education shows that schools using Pupil Premium funding to best effect have *significantly* reduced this gap. We continue to support this policy, and would protect real terms funding for the Pupil Premium and seek to increase it.

4.2.2 The biggest impact on closing the attainment gap is made by investment in the early years. As set out in our 2017 manifesto, our priority will be to increase the Early Years pupil premium from its current level of £300 to £1000 per child.

4.2.3 The Pupil Premium gives discretion on how additional money should be used to support poorer pupils entirely with schools. We believe this is the right approach, as those closest to the children are likely to make the best decisions about how their education can best be supported. Schools are already answerable to inspectors over how Pupil Premium money is spent to support individual children, and we believe this should continue.

4.2.4 Pupil Premium funds must not be reduced due to changes to the welfare system or barriers parents face to signing-up. The Liberal Democrats would ensure that any transition to Universal Credit or other welfare reforms do not artificially lower the share of students

eligible for free school meals and the Pupil Premium. Liberal Democrats would also explore means of claiming this funding more streamlined.

4.3 Out of School Activities

4.3.1 Children spend many more hours out of school than they spend in it. We won't narrow the gap by focusing only on what happens in classrooms. It will take investment in communities and sustained work to raise hopes, provide opportunity and level the playing field.

4.3.2 A huge amount of what children learn, and what they enjoy happens outside school. It is often the music, drama or sport that a child enjoys in the evenings and weekends which will determine their final choice of employment or further education. In many parts of the country children have a wide range of out of school activities available to them at an affordable cost. However in some areas, the level of out-of-school activity has been much reduced as a result of cuts to Local Authority budgets, or geographical factors which make it more difficult to run them.

4.3.3 The opportunity to attend high-quality out-of-school activities should be available to all children, not just those with parents who can pay for them, and have the luxury of the time to take their children to such activities. Cuts to local government have dramatically reduced the availability of youth clubs and other similar institutions, which were on offer to everyone in the community. Many young people now spend large amounts of time in their homes on-line, with potential consequences for both their mental and physical health.

4.3.4 We would require all Local Authorities to map the activities available to children in their area, and identify any localities or any groups which were suffering from a lack of after school activity or provision. We would create a fund for local authorities to encourage the development of high-quality out-of-school educational activities. The type of activities would need to be tailored to the local area, as what is appropriate in a Cornish fishing village is likely to be quite different from say, in central Bradford, but the need for fair access to out-of-

school learning is something we feel has been neglected in education policy for some years. We will put the Youth Service on a statutory basis.

4.3.5 We would also re-direct the role of the National Citizen Service towards providing high quality out of school education for those from 11 - 18 in areas where local authorities identified a shortage. We believe all children should benefit from a choice of after school activities, no matter where they live or whether their parents can afford the time or cost of such activities.

4.4 Free School Meals

4.4.1 Many studies have shown that hunger affects concentration, and that well-nourished children fare better at school. Under the old system, many children entitled to free school meals did not receive them, while many children not entitled to them by parental income were still not getting a good lunch. The Schools Food Plan published in 2013 found that only 1% of packed lunches would meet nutritional standards. This is why in government the Liberal Democrats introduced free school meals for all children in the first three years of primary school in 2014. Making school meals free for all children cuts through these problems and also reduces the social stigma attached to claiming a free meal on the basis of income. In addition to the educational benefits, free school meals also help with household budgets to the tune of £400 per child per year – a real boost for struggling families.

4.4.2 The Conservatives 2017 Manifesto committed then to abolish free school meals, but this proved disastrously unpopular and has not been taken forward. Liberal Democrats would build on the success of free school meals by extending them to all primary school children. We would also support school breakfast clubs.

4.5 Disadvantaged Groups

4.5.1 Aside from the attainment gap driven by wealth, ethnicity and gender also influence attainment. The relationship between ethnicity

and academic attainment is complicated. Some BAME groups have generally high academic attainment but some specific groups consistently show lower attainment. Recent research by LKMco tells us that even those who attain well are often under-performing in Higher Education and the jobs market. There is marked ethnic bias in school exclusions, with traveller children four times more likely than average to be excluded and Black Caribbean children three times more likely. The inspection system should be used to make schools aware of their responsibilities to all pupils regardless of backgrounds. Our proposals on exclusions (see 6.1.7) are aimed to prevent wrongful use of the exclusions system by schools. The party's new race equality working group will need to give further attention to attainment in schools.

5. Good education means good teachers

5.1 Every child deserves to be taught by a trained professional

5.1.2 After parental wealth and education, the next most important factor in educational achievement is the quality of teaching.

5.1.3 There is a serious crisis in teacher recruitment and retention across the UK. Liberal Democrats believe that every child deserves to be taught by a trained professional with, or working towards, Qualified Teacher Status and appropriate subject specific qualifications, and that we should make clear our vision of teachers as a highly qualified, and highly valued work-force.

5.1.4 We support whole-heartedly the new, independent Chartered College of Teaching, and we will work with them to enhance the standing of the teaching profession. The college should have greater powers to make recommendations on career progression for teachers. We would like to see far more teachers progress to Masters' degree level, and would like to see this recognised within the pay structure for teachers.

5.1.5 We believe that the education system needs to value teachers more, across the whole system, treating them as professionals whose judgement should be valued and relied upon. We will return to this in our sections on Assessment and Ofsted.

5.1.6 We believe that the role of Universities in training teachers remains key. We would ensure that every initial teacher education course would ensure that new teachers are linked to a university, even those within School-Centred Initial Teacher Training centres. Teach First has recently extended its one-year PGCE course to a two-year post-graduate diploma. We support this move and would look to roll this out across other providers.

5.2 Enhancing the professional environment for the benefit of teachers and pupils

5.2.1 Work load and burn-out are two of the key reasons teachers give for leaving teaching, and since good teaching requires teachers to be inspirational, we believe that concerns over teacher work-load must be taken seriously. Some workload issues must be left to school management to tackle, but burnout is also often a factor of insufficient time being given to professional development and support. Two critical issues ignored for too long are the key importance of continuing professional development of staff and the value of teacher to teacher shared learning whereby those with different cultural and work experience can exchange their knowledge with colleagues, each benefitting for the advantage of their teaching abilities and of their students.

5.2.2 We also believe teachers need and deserve a far better offer for continuing professional development. Too often the In-Service Training days which are the statutory requirement for teachers CPD, are taken up with planning and paperwork. This time is needed for teachers to do their work well, but it should not be at the expense of high quality professional development. As laid out in our 2017 manifesto we would introduce a national entitlement to genuine high quality professional development for all teachers, with at least 25 hours per year, rising to the OECD average of 50 hours of high quality, relevant, empowering on-the-job training every year. In the long run we would extend the CPD entitlement to teaching assistants.

6. School Structures

6.1.1 There has been a radical change in the way schools are governed following the expansion of the academies programme. The introduction of academies in the late 1990s, and the subsequent trend towards academisation of schools, has contributed to a complicated schools landscape in England.

6.1.2 Academies operate independently of the Local Authority. The first wave of academies, established by the Labour Government in the late 1990s, replaced previously failing Local Authority Maintained Schools. Throughout the remainder of the last Labour Government, and into the Coalition, the trend towards academisation continued. The number of academies has increased rapidly over the last few years; to date, only 35% of secondary schools remain under LA oversight. There is no clear evidence however that either model – academization or LA - in itself brings benefits in school performance.

6.1.3 The Education and Adoption Act 2016 introduced additional powers of intervention against underperforming schools, including the power to remove a school from the oversight of the Local Authority and force it to become an academy. These powers lie in the hands of Regional Schools Commissioners (RSCs).

6.1.4 In 2014 The Government appointed eight Regional School Commissioners (RSCs) to support the Secretary of State. They are advised by a board of head teachers (Head Teacher Boards, HTBs), members of which are appointed or elected by academy schools. They are responsible for taking action where schools, or their sponsors, are failing; such action may include forcing LA maintained schools to become academies, intervening in the running of academies and free schools, or taking action to improve underperforming sponsors. Critics point out that RSC's are very expensive, and their work with HTBs is highly opaque.

6.1.5 Liberal Democrats recognise that some Multi-Academy Trusts (academy chains) have brought new innovation and improvement to

areas where Local Authorities had failed to improve standards. We also believe that the last thing the education system needs at this stage is more radical structural upheaval that occupies hundreds of hours of senior leader and governor time where they should be focusing on children, young adults and classrooms. However there are major problems with fragmentation and inconsistency of the current system.

6.1.6 The move by so many schools to academy status has left a large hole in the management of inter-school relationships. Functions such as planning the right number of school places, and managing the education of children who are at risk of exclusion are effectively missing in the current structure.

6.1.7 Liberal Democrats believe that all of these functions are best managed by democratically elected Local Authorities (LAs). We would return the responsibility for school place planning to LAs, and we would give them the authority to require Academy Schools to cooperate with LAs in ensuring school places, managed moves where children are threatened with exclusion and ensuring SEND support is provided in the way that best benefits the local community as a whole. It is right that schools should be able to set aspects of their own admissions policies, in compliance with the national code, which allows them to specialise in, for example, music or business if they wish to. However the local admissions process to administer the policy and allocate individual children to schools, should be carried out by the local authority, rather than individual schools. Similarly, the appeal process against individual allocations should be run by the local authority, again clearly accountable for good performance in this through the inspection system. This will ensure that all pupils are treated fairly, and that all local schools play their part in and meeting the needs of the community in a socially cohesive way. We recognise this will require appropriate resourcing for LAs.

6.1.8 We do not believe that there is a need for the unaccountable Regional Schools Commissioners and would abolish them. As set out in 7.5.10, we do not believe that forced academisation should be the inevitable result of a drop in attainment.

6.1.9 We will require Local Authorities to take back the role of monitoring and oversight, with smaller LA's required to work with neighbours to ensure a coherent approach. School improvement functions could be offered by MATs or neighbouring LAs.

6.1.10 We also believe that there is an unnecessary disparity between the way LAs and MATs are treated, and we would legislate to ensure that LAs are treated with equality with MATs. This equality would mean MATs would be subject to inspection in the same way as LAs are, and that LAs would be able to bid for new schools or to become the partners for failing schools as MATS can. If the individual local authority becomes effectively the 'backer' of one option, then the decision will be taken by a schools adjudicator independent of both the local authority and the Department for Education.

7. Curriculum, Standards, and Inspection

7.1 Introduction

7.1.1 For many years the English education system has relied on inspection, national tests and league tables to drive up standards. We now have rising stress, falling recruitment and no significant evidence of large scale school improvement in the last five years. Clearly, more accountability and testing cannot be the solution.

7.1.2 Liberal Democrats believe that we need a new vision for school improvement, and a new attitude to improving standards in Education. We have a vision of an education system based on treating teachers and schools as highly skilled professional organisations, with systems focused on supporting and improving, not measuring and catching out weakness.

7.2 Curriculum

7.2.1 The National Curriculum provides a programme of study which all LA-maintained schools must follow. Academies are not required to teach the national curriculum. English, maths, science, computing, physical education and citizenship and are all compulsory subjects at Key Stage 4 (ages 14 – 16). Aside from these subjects, all secondary pupils in LA maintained schools must be allowed to study at least one subject from several categories, including the arts and modern foreign languages.

7.2.2 In 2014 changes to the national curriculum were implemented. Broadly, these changes were intended to make the curriculum more rigorous, knowledge-based and prioritise depth over breadth. Whilst some in the education community have welcomed the shift, critics argue that the revised national curriculum has resulted in a narrower programme of study. Indeed, the move towards the 'English Baccalaureate', a secondary school performance measure which places emphasis on perceived 'core' subjects, has contributed to decreased uptake of some subjects, particularly in the arts. Some exam boards

have been forced to stop offering subjects which have fallen out of favour.

7.2.3 To what extent the curriculum should be 'skills-based' or 'knowledge-based', is a topic of debate within the educational community. Supporters of the 2014 reforms point out that the previous curriculum was almost entirely devoid of prescribed knowledge, and that such a curriculum risked inhibiting 'cultural literacy' amongst pupils. Critics of the revised curriculum suggest that the changes go too far, and that the Government has replaced a broad curriculum, which rightly prioritised the teaching of skills, with an arbitrarily narrow and fact-heavy curriculum.

7.2.4 In practice only 35% of secondary schools are actually obliged to teach the national curriculum (owing to their academy status).

7.2.5 There is considerable concern regarding the teaching of relationships and sex education. Whilst some degree of RSE is compulsory from age 11, critics point out that the curriculum is limited, outdated, and that teacher training for RSE delivery is insufficient. There is also good reason to think that age 11 is too late and that, in light of increased access to digital technology at a young age (increasing access to pornography and likelihood of 'sexting') pupils should be given earlier exposure to RSE. The Liberal Democrats have long campaigned for RSE being delivered earlier, and more robustly.

7.2.6 Our key proposal is to establish an independent Education Standards Authority to pilot, phase-in and resource future policy changes in consultation with professionals and experts. We would give the ESA a remit to develop a broad and balanced curriculum to be taught in all state schools (including Academies). In addition to academic subjects, this would include a 'curriculum for life' including financial literacy, first aid and emergency lifesaving skills, mental health education, citizenship, and age-appropriate Sex and Relationship Education (SRE). SRE would cover teaching about sexual consent, LGBT+ relationships, and issues surrounding explicit images and content.

7.2.7 We would also require that any changes to the curriculum should have at least a four-year lead time to allow schools to plan without excessive burdens on teachers and pupils.

7.3 Raising Standards

7.3.1 We believe that for the majority of pupils, standards of education in England are high. GCSE and A level qualifications are recognised world-wide, and a large number of pupils go on to study at UK and International Universities of the highest calibre.

7.3.2 The area where we consider the English Education system is not performing well enough is the “long tail” of under-achievement by those who leave education without five good GCSE passes.

7.3.3 In order to raise standards and achievement for all pupils we would move away from the very pressurised high-stakes testing regime the English education system has become. We do not feel that this high-stakes testing regime can do any more to improve standards, and that the time has come to look at whether testing may be having a detrimental impact on teaching quality. We are also concerned that too much teaching to the test may be putting some students off school at an early age, and contributing to mental ill-health.

7.3.4 For these reasons we would scrap the current high-stakes mandatory SATs tests at KS2. These would be replaced with a combination of a moderated teacher assessment at the end of each phase and a lighter-touch standardized test to ensure consistency. The details of this test would be developed by the Education Standards Authority in conjunction with the profession and assessment experts. We support recent moves to abolish KS1 SATs and teacher assessments, and the creation of a reception baseline assessment that we believe should be integrated with the Early Years Foundation Stage Profile to avoid an increase in teacher workload.

7.3.5 We believe that schools have a responsibility to ensure pupils make good progress, and we would keep the Progress 8 measure which has been developed for secondary schools. For this reason the level at

which pupils enter secondary school is important, and some level of cross-school monitoring at primary level will be needed to ensure teacher assessments are comparable. We would expect MATs and LAs to work with their partner schools to develop tools to assist with teacher assessment across their areas. The abolition of SATs testing would not mean students were not tested, but that it is conducted in a more rational and less pressurized way.

7.3.6 We firmly believe that an overhaul of the high-stakes national testing regime which primary schools currently face would improve the quality of teaching, and mean students entered secondary education without having a love of learning smothered out of them.

7.3.7 GCSE examinations have just undergone a major reform, and we do not believe it would be in the interests of pupils to redesign the GCSE exam in the immediate future. A period of stability is required at this stage, for the new exam system to be accepted and understood by employers. In the longer term, however, the need for GCSE exams should be examined. When the majority of students left education at 16 there was a strong argument for a set of national examinations at this point. However now that the school leaving age has moved to 18, a review of the role of GCSEs is needed.

7.3.8 We are concerned that the EBacc measure has had a seriously detrimental impact in narrowing the curriculum, and reducing the take up of subjects such as art, music, drama, RE and design and technology, all of which are extremely valuable, and important for a 21st century economy and society. We would therefore stop requiring schools to follow the EBacc measure and focus instead on Progress 8.

7.4 Performance Tables

7.4.1 A change in the testing regime also leads to a change in the way data is used to judge schools. Secondary school league tables are based on the proportion of students getting GCSE A*-C grades (changing this year to use Attainment 8 and Progress 8). Primary school league tables are based on Key Stage 2 SATS results (covering reading,

writing and maths) and what percentage of pupils reach the expected Level (Level 4).

7.4.2 The current way in which school performance data is reported places undue emphasis on the most recent set of results, which can fluctuate significantly purely due to natural variations in the ability level of student cohorts. This creates a situation where every year hundreds of secondary schools' results rise or fall by more than 15 percentage points, and in nearly all cases an improvement or decline in teaching will only explain a portion of this change. Yet these changes are used to judge the performance of our schools.

7.4.3 School performance data is also reported without reference to other information parents consider important: child well-being, extracurricular provision and character development.

7.4.4 The pressure on schools to deliver results in KS4 has led some schools to pressure students to leave, and is a disincentive to accepting new pupils in years 10 and 11.

7.4.5 We want to put an end to the damaging and divisive competition between schools which the current school performance tables (known as 'league tables') encourage. They reflect only a few very narrow elements of a child's school experience and force schools and teachers to place a disproportionate emphasis on those measures, often at the expense of providing a more rounded educational experience. Concerns have frequently been raised that league tables, at least in their current form, promote a culture of 'teaching to the test' and jumping through hoops to better their scores on the table, as opposed to focussing on giving pupils the most rounded education.

7.4.6 We would therefore replace the existing league tables with a reformed system including more qualitative information about schools. This qualitative information will be based on a submission by each school, which will then be verified based on a combination of peer-to-peer reviews between neighbouring school leaders (including some schools from outside the Local Authority or MAT the school belongs to),

as well as feedback from students, teachers and parent governors. These should cover the performance and ethos of the school, including information on pastoral care, mental health support offered to pupils, and the breadth of subjects offered. For secondary schools, destination data should also be included. Schools which are found to have made false or exaggerated claims will be flagged to the Local Authority or MAT, who will then carry out a more extensive review.

7.4.7 This would be implemented in conjunction with wider reform of inspections (see 7.5) so that they include a focus on longer-term outcomes and sustainable improvement as well as teacher workload, sickness and retention.

7.4.8 Of course there will still be overall performance data on schools for public examinations, including Value Added data, and these should still be publicly available. However there will not be a government league table based on a few narrow criteria. Other interested parties could of course still compare exam results between schools but crucially parents and students will have much more rounded context in which to place it. For data that draws on KS4 results (Progress and Attainment 8), we would explore including the GCSE results of all students who attended a school during KS3 and KS4 regardless of where they sit their GCSEs. This could be done by weighting pupil contributions to performance data by the number of terms spent at a school. This would encourage schools to take on new pupils, and the remove the incentive to force out lower ability students prior to GCSE exams.

7.5 Inspection

7.5.1 While we strongly believe that there needs to be a robust inspection system, we do not believe that high-stakes Ofsted inspections as currently conducted are the best way to improve school standards. The fact that a 'requires improvement' overall judgement can directly result in forced academisation or other changes to the governance of a school makes the whole process extremely stressful and high-stakes for teachers and governors, and this passes on to the

pupils. We both need to improve the inspection system itself and to change the way inspection outcomes are used.

7.5.2 Ofsted continues to attract serious and broad criticism from across the education community. Much of this criticism centres around two points; the reliability and validity of judgements, and the negative impact of the inspection regime on schools, teachers and pupils.

7.5.3 The accuracy and reliability of Ofsted's judgements have been called into question, particularly with regards to lesson observation. A recent report by the think tank Policy Exchange included data analyses suggesting that the chance of an Ofsted lesson judgement aligning with actual progress made (value added) in the lesson was around fifty percent.

7.5.4 There is a growing evidence to suggest that Ofsted judgements do not correlate with actual school performance, in terms of value-added attainment data. This is concerning, as overall Ofsted judgements are heavily influenced by attainment data. Recent data analyses conducted by the EPI show that Ofsted judgements too often fail to correlate with value-added attainment data. Data also suggest that schools with high proportions of students eligible for free school meals, and/or a high proportion of students with low prior attainment are less likely to receive a favourable grading, irrespective of actual performance.

7.5.5 Significant concerns have been raised about inspectors' understanding and interpretation of attainment data. There is also concern about the validity and reliability of judgements made around leadership, quality of teaching and progress made.

7.5.6 Teachers and school leaders raise serious concerns around the impact of Ofsted inspection on their practice. Perceptions around 'what Ofsted want', and the high-stakes nature of inspection, leads to extreme pressure on teachers, school leaders and the LA, Board or MAT that holds them to account. Repeated changes in Ofsted requirements make schools feel that the goalposts are continually being moved.

Focus on Ofsted's latest requirement can have unintended consequences in that other important areas of teaching become neglected.

7.5.7 The Ofsted grading system has also been called into question. Schools receive a rating between 1 and 4; '1' being 'outstanding' and '4' inadequate. The much-coveted 'outstanding' grade often brings a significant reputational boost and grants a degree of immunity from further inspection. Critics highlight the unreliable and inconsistent nature of 'outstanding' grading, and question its one-size-fits-all straitjacket.

7.5.8 We would therefore replace Ofsted with a new HM Inspector of Schools, drawing on the best traditions of Her Majesty's Inspectorate of Schools. Inspection reports should be produced in a report card format, which in addition to attainment measures would also cover topics such as:

- Curriculum breadth and appropriateness.
- Pupil feedback via online survey.
- Parent feedback via online survey.
- Pupil welfare and vulnerable groups.
- Leadership and management.
- Longer-term pupil outcomes and sustainable improvement.
- Promotion of equality of opportunity and community cohesion.
- Teacher workload, sickness and retention.

7.5.9 The four-level grading should be replaced with just three levels – Good, Requires Improvement and Requires Support. Inspections should take place for all schools every three years. Independent schools should also be subject to the same inspection regime. Inspections will apply to LAs and MATs as well as individual schools. We do not propose any change in the inspection arrangements for social services.

7.5.10 Under our proposals, decisions to intervene in schools or change their governance arrangements will normally be made by the Local Authority or MAT. We will end the presumption that a dip in results will trigger academisation or re-brokering of schools already functioning as academies. Instead a sustained decrease in results (or an inability to improve) would trigger greater support from the MAT or LA responsible for the school, with monitoring from DfE. The inspections process will provide evidence for the improvement partner, which they can take into account alongside all the other evidence they have of the performance of the school. The system can therefore remain robust in ensuring that poor standards are not allowed to persist, while removing the very stressful all-or-nothing impact of the current Ofsted regime.

8. Further Education

8.1.1 Further Education is one of the most poorly-funded sectors, yet it is critical to the success of our education system.

8.1.2 Further Education is provided in a wide variety of different ways across the country. This variety is desirable in giving different options for post-16 education to many students, but it also means the sector is less able to speak with one voice, and often less good in fighting for a fair share of funding. We would work towards parity of funding for schools and FE colleges.

8.1.3 The introduction of the apprenticeship levy should be providing a much-needed injection of money into post-16 education, but it is not clear that the levy is making its way into the areas for which it was intended. While some employers are working closely with local colleges, we are concerned that too many are simply paying the levy.

8.1.4 We would allocate a share of apprenticeship levy money to local authorities/Combined Authorities for investment in further education in their area. We would give LAs or Combined Authorities a clear role in liaising with employers in their area and planning with local sixth forms, and colleges to provide the right courses. There has been more competition in the area of FE than in most areas of education, as schools and colleges compete both for student numbers and for the highest achieving students. We do not believe this competition has always been in the best interests of students. We would also require all MATs and LAs to live up to the obligation to provide arms-length careers advice to all pupils, but with a particular focus on those pupils who might not want to continue to A levels.

8.1.5 We will end the requirement that all 17-year-olds who don't get level C/4 for GCSE are forced to retake the following year, which we do not believe is necessary or in the best interest of all students.

8.1.6 One of the major barriers young people face in accessing apprenticeships or Further education is the cost of transport. We would

therefore introduce a new Young Person's Bus Discount Card, for young people aged 16–21, giving a two-thirds discount on bus travel – allowing young people to access education, apprenticeships, and work.

9. Home schooling and un-registered schools

9.1.1 While we recognise the rights of parents to choose how their children are educated we believe there is a need for greater supervision of those children who are educated outside registered schools. There have been cases of children who have come to serious harm while invisible to the system because they were being home schooled. The number of such cases is small, and we would not want to see the vast majority of parents who home school their children extremely well put to great inconvenience, but we believe there is a duty to ensure the safety of such children.

9.1.2 There are also examples of unregistered schools which are providing a type of education which would not be allowed in a registered school. Unregistered schools fall entirely outside the inspection and regulatory regimes for ensuring that children are in a physically safe and healthy environment, that they are safe from physical or sexual abuse, and that they receive an education that is fit for purpose and prepares them for adult life. In the most extreme cases, English is not even spoken, so some children will not learn even basic English language skills.

9.1.3 We would therefore require that children who are being educated outside a registered school be visited biannually by a representative of the LA to ensure that appropriate education was being given and that such children are being educated in line with the national curriculum entitlement set out above, with a focus on those who have minimal contact with agencies and are at risk of falling through the system. We would also strengthen the hand of LAs to deal with unregistered schools, including by reviewing the legislation.

9.1.4 Some parents feel they have no alternative to withdrawing their child from the school system because they suffer from bullying, which the school is for whatever reason unable to address. We regard this as a significant failing and do not believe parents should ever be put in this position. Home schooling should always be a genuine choice, rather than a last resort.

10. Early Years Education

10.1.1 The Liberal Democrats have a proud record of investing in early years education, and we continue to believe that investing in the education of the youngest children has huge benefits. We are concerned that the government's move to provide 30 hours free child-care to families where both parents are working may have a detrimental impact on the quality of early years provision. The funding for the 30 hours provision is so low, that quality must be at risk.

10.1.2 We would treble the early years pupil premium to help tackle this issue. We are also concerned at the level of qualification and pay endemic throughout early years provision. We would require that all early years' settings have a training programme for staff, with the majority of staff who are working with children to either have a relevant qualification or be working towards one. In the long run we want to see a Graduate leader in every early years setting.

10.1.3 Liberal Democrats welcome the valuable role that Children's Centres play both in the services they provide for children, but also vitally in helping parents improve their parenting skills and support their children's learning. Liberal Democrats believe all parents should have good access to Children's Centre services, providing help and advice in the crucial earliest phase of a child's life. We would require Health and Well-being Boards to review the level of support available and ensure that the youngest children and their parents are being well supported in their area. Health and Well-being boards have a critical role in joining up health and local authority services, and we would like to see them take more responsibility for scrutinising services available to new parents. Teaching good parenting skills to new parents can have a massive impact on the life chances of young children. This was a key success of children's centres, and we are concerned that much good work is now being lost.

11. Mental Health

11.1.1 Liberal Democrats believe that we should do everything we can to support young people's mental health and wellbeing, and that doing so is critical to ensuring that young people get the most from their education.

11.1.2 There is a mental health crisis among our young people with rapidly rising waiting lists for high level mental health support. Shockingly, suicide is the leading cause of death among young people, and levels of self-harm, drug misuse, eating disorders, depression and anxiety are rising.

11.1.3 Liberal Democrats believe that some of the rise in stress and anxiety among young people is related to a school system which is obsessively focussed on high-stakes testing. There are clear peaks in demand for mental health services in spring and early summer, as exam pressure rises. We need to re-focus our education system on supporting our young people to succeed, teaching them to become resilient, rather than relentlessly testing them and their teachers. Thus our proposals for reforming the school inspection system, with a much broader focus on pupil well-being, is part of our response to the mental health crisis among young people.

11.1.4 While reforming the school inspection system will remove some of the extreme pressure which is currently proving so damaging in our education system, that is only one part of the picture.

11.1.5 We support the proposals in the "Future in Mind" mental health strategy. £1.4 billion has already been promised for children and young peoples' mental health. This money must be released immediately, and there must be transparency about how it is spent. We would give a significant proportion of this money to local authorities, as part of their public health budgets, to be directed towards early intervention services, particularly commissioning independent mental health counselling in all secondary schools and FE colleges. Such counselling is currently in use in a piecemeal fashion in many parts of

England and Wales. Since there is good evidence that early intervention reduces the risk for later mental illnesses and can contribute to improving educational performance and reducing the burden on mental health services. Liberal Democrats are strongly in favour of a school-based counselling services supporting teachers and connecting to the NHS. By tackling issues early young people can be supported in their schools and communities. This support needs to be provided by staff trained in mental health, and must not be an additional expectation on the workload of teachers.

11.1.6 We recognise that there are some children and young people who need more support. For them there is a need for clearer mental health pathways from early help and support services based in schools into the more specialist services offered by children's mental health services. We also recognise that there are major issues with young people being transferred from children's mental health services into adult services at 18. Many young people are at their maximum levels of exam stress at age 17 and 18. If they try to access mental health services at this age they are referred to adult services, where the thresholds for treatment are extremely high, and where the services on offer are often inappropriate, and not designed to support young people. We would require the NHS to treat young people who are referred for mental health treatment before the age of 19 as young people up until age 25, as is the case for local authorities managing individuals with Education Health and Care Plans. Getting mental health treatment right for those diagnosed with mental health problems while in their teenage years has huge implications for their future. Getting it wrong can have massive costs for society, with increased risks of drug dependency, criminality and many other social issues. Investing in supporting these young people to succeed will pay huge dividends in the long term.

11.1.7 While for many young people mental health issues occur in the teenage years, there is a small group of children who suffer trauma and neglect while very young, and for whom this has a major impact on their growth and development. Identifying these children early is crucial

to ensuring they get the support they need to thrive. We would include screening for trauma and neglect as part of the role of early years settings and primary schools, with an obligation to request a formal assessment of any child about whom the school had serious concerns. This would be monitored as part of the new inspection framework.

11.1.8 We also recognize that bullying in schools can be a major contributor to mental ill-health. We would support schools in tackling all forms of bullying, including bullying on the basis of gender, sexuality, gender identity, or gender expression. Every school has an obligation to create a welcoming environment in which all pupils can feel at home. This should be a major consideration in school inspections. Our 'Curriculum for Life' will also help children learn to respect each other, and will teach them how to deal with issues like cyber-bullying.

12. SEND

12.1.1 The fragmentation of the schools system has had a particularly detrimental impact on pupils with Special Educational Needs or Disability (SEND). Such pupils are six times more likely to be excluded than non-SEND pupils. They are also more likely to be home educated as parents vote with their feet and leave a school system they feel is failing their child.

12.1.2 Our new approach to school inspection and accountability, with a focus on well-being and support rather than excessive emphasis on exam results alone, will help create a school system in which all children can thrive. The current high-stakes testing regime is particularly stressful for those children who do not fit the expectations of what they will achieve at a given age. The exam pressure on schools, as well as on pupils, often leads to children who do not fit the expected standards being pushed out by schools who are worried such a child will have a detrimental impact on the schools overall results. This is a systemic problem, and one which must be tackled by a broader vision of what a good school provides.

12.1.3 The current squeeze on Local Authority funding has had a major impact on the support available to those with SEND. Local Authorities have had to make reductions in the specialist teachers and educational psychologists who provided expert advice to schools teaching SEND pupils. Liberal Democrats believe that there is an important role for local authorities in ensuring high quality SEND services are available when needed. Most MATs are not big enough to employ teams of educational psychologists, yet such services are critical in supporting mainstream teachers to teach SEND pupils effectively. We would ensure the LAs role in this area was recognised, and LAs would be inspected on the quality of their SEND support services. This would include partnerships between mainstream and special or alternative settings where expertise and training can be shared properly.

12.1.4 Liberal Democrats also recognise that main stream school is not appropriate for all children. We believe there should be choice for

parents of SEND children. There is a clear role for schools which specialise in teaching pupils with SEND, just as clearly many SEND pupils are thriving in main-stream school. Special schools would be inspected in the same way as other schools under our new inspection regime, with an emphasis on a broad and balanced curriculum, appropriate to the child, and also with a focus on the ultimate destination of the child when they leave education. Many special schools are judged outstanding by OFSTED under the current inspection regime, yet the number of pupils from special schools who move on to further education, higher education apprenticeships or work is disappointingly low. While it would be expected that pupils being educated in special schools will sometimes have a different trajectory from their mainstream peers, we do not believe enough is being done in such schools to prepare their pupils for a productive working life.

12.1.5 Liberal Democrats are also concerned that some pupils with serious physical health issues are being failed by the current school system because of an unhealthy obsession with attendance levels. While there is a clear link between achievement and attendance, there are a significant proportion of pupils for whom 95% attendance is simply not possible due to ill health. As with other issues a more sensitive school inspection system would remove some of the pressure on schools to enforce high attendance where it is not appropriate. We would give headteachers an obligation to manage attendance rates in consultation with parents in the first instance; rather than encouraging a draconian confrontational approach.

13. Hearing the Voices of Parents and Children

13.1.1 Liberal Democrats believe that the best way to help children achieve at school is to ensure a secure family life, with decent housing and opportunity for their parents.

13.1.2 We recognise parents' responsibilities as the primary carers of their children, not just for their academic attainment but for their overall wellbeing and learning. We will reduce the pressure on local authorities and schools to issue fines for absence, encouraging instead a collaborative approach between schools and parents which puts the wider interests of the child at the centre, with an understanding that up to ten days absence within term time per year can be authorised with the support of the Head Teacher.

13.1.3 While most children thrive in schools, parents tell us too many are being failed by the increasing pressure to conform to narrowing definitions of attainment. Few children go through their entire school life without being stressed by something, whether friendship related, bullying or school work but for some children, school can be a stressful and difficult place all the time. We will ensure these children are supported into education and not pushed out.

13.1.4 Parents need assurance that formal educational institutions will understand their child, whatever their aptitudes and abilities, and nurture them, help equip them with the skills and attributes to navigate and thrive in a rapidly changing world. We will encourage a culture of partnership between families and education establishments from the outset, giving nurseries and schools the time, training & resources to do so.

13.1.5 We all develop and learn at different rates and at different times in our lives. We will actively pursue alternatives to strict age-related year groups. The removal of SATs and the emphasis on league tables will remove one of the barriers to schools allowing children to move to different year groups when this is appropriate. At present schools must enter all children for SATs at the required age, which

means most schools are very reluctant to allow children to change year groups, as they would be taking tests which they had not been prepared for. In allowing the option of teacher assessment or alternative progress measures we would allow for schools to be more sensitive to the needs of individual children, who may have August birthdays, or have missed schooling due to ill health or other reasons.

13.1.6 In establishing a culture of a three-way partnership between child-parent-school, we will start this at policy stage, supporting and encouraging the voice of parents and pupils in policy development and implementation. We will look to carry out meaningful consultation and impact assessments across families and workplaces of significant policy changes. At a school level, we recognise that far greater use could be made of parental knowledge and expertise. At the moment, there is significant bureaucratic burden on parents wishing to become governors. Parents governors are in any case not there to represent the views of parents specifically. Many headteachers are great communicators but others are not able or trained in how to communicate with adults. Communication, collaboration and constructive challenge are skills which need to be fostered in children and adults alike. At the moment, parents frustrated with decisions schools are making have two choices: follow a formal complaints procedure or go public on social media and/or in the press. These routes can lead to an escalation of conflict, tension and animosity which can impact on the whole school community. We will focus on removing the current stressors between families and schools. We will encourage and support mechanisms for better communications between schools and parents, with an expectation that every state school will have a Parents Council (as well as a School Council to represent the views of pupils). We will also require that there is a Local Advisory Board for every school within a MAT.

Every Child Empowered: Education for a changing world

Policy Paper 128

This paper has been approved for debate by the Federal Conference by the Federal Policy Committee under the terms of Article 8.4 of the Federal Constitution.

Within the policy-making procedure of the Liberal Democrats, the Federal Party determines the policy of the Party in those areas which might reasonably be expected to fall within the remit of the federal institutions in the context of a federal United Kingdom.

The Party in England, the Scottish Liberal Democrats, the Welsh Liberal Democrats and the Northern Ireland Local Party determine the policy of the Party on all other issues, except that any or all of them may confer this power upon the Federal Party in any specified area or areas.

The Party in England has chosen to pass up policymaking to the Federal level. If approved by Conference, this paper will therefore form the policy of the Federal Party on federal issues and the Party in England on English issues. In appropriate policy areas, Scottish, Welsh and Northern Ireland party policy would take precedence.

Working group on Education

Note: Membership of the working group should not be taken to indicate that every member necessarily agrees with every statement of every proposal in this paper.

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